



How to Answer Tough Questions

We are programmed to answer questions when they are asked of us, aren't we?
You're doing it right now, aren't you?

Answering questions is a reflex, almost as automatic as pulling your hand away from a hot stove.

Behavioral psychologists understand that most of us can easily be put on the defensive and perhaps even caught off guard when asked certain types of "tough" questions.

My role as a behavioral management specialist is to help you escape from the clutches of questions, so you don't get trapped, uncomfortable, or left at a psychological disadvantage.

So instead of STIMULUS-RESPONSE, where you get imprisoned in the cycle of QUESTION-ANSWER, in the pages that follow, I will show you seven strategies where you can have a pause between that stimulus-response reflex, a STIMULUS-PAUSE-RESPONSE, that enables you to have more success in how you respond.

These are among the most effective ways to deal with a question, derived from behavioral psychology, and even from politics.

They include:

- 1. Throw it Back to Them... answer a question with a question**
- 2. Use a Boomerang... "that's exactly the reason why..."**
- 3. Challenge the Question – "Why would you ask such a question?"**
- 4. Answer a Different Question Than What's Asked – Henry Kissinger's favorite technique**
- 5. Answer the Deeper Question – 5WHY**
- 6. Delay Answering It... "Let me think about it..."**
- 7. Don't Answer**

Try them and watch how much more effective and impressive you can be.

#1: Throw it Back to Them...



Otherwise known as – “answer a question with a question,” this can be an effective way to clarify what is being asked, while preventing the other person from controlling the conversation or putting you on the defensive, if that’s an issue.

Example:

“Are you available to work this weekend?”

“Do you want me to work this weekend?”

An alternative, is to answer the question briefly, and then follow with a question.

Example:

“Are you willing to lower your price?”

“I’m not sure. Is the price a problem for you?”

Especially when someone presents you with a “tough” question, responding with your own question can put them on the spot, taking the heat off you, while getting them to elaborate further on their intent.

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE – HOW THE RIGHT QUESTIONS SAVED MY LIFE

Long before my behavioral management days, I ran a small advertising agency in Montreal, focusing on consumer behavior.

For me, as a shy kid starting out, doing presentations to prospective clients was nerve-racking at best.

I knew we had real advantages. But communicating that to clients who asked, “What do you do,” and “Why should we work with you rather than the others,” made me nervous and uncomfortable.

To solve this discomfort and help me be more effective, we came up with five simple questions that would clarify exactly what they needed.

And suddenly, my life was changed forever.

Now, instead of me being on the defensive and answering the “What do you do” question with a long diatribe of stories, images and statistics, I would say,

“Let me show you. But first, could I ask you a few questions?”

They would always say, Yes, and I would proceed.

Back then I asked, “What do you sell; To who; How is your product or service used; What are you competing with; and Why should someone buy yours instead of the alternatives?” Later I added, “How have you been marketing up til now; What have you been most happy and unhappy with; and What do you hope we will achieve that was not achieved up until now?”

Later, with our behavioral management firm, we had more sophisticated questions. But the result was the same.

Our incomes (and results) skyrocketed, for a simple reason.

Once I used the 5-Questions, suddenly I was in the driver’s seat, learning exactly what they wanted. It was a lot more comfortable. Then, I’d ONLY show samples and discuss issues that were relevant to their specific needs.

This might seem simplistic and obvious, but don’t be fooled. I’ve trained and coached thousands of business owners, coaches and consultants. It still floors me how few are armed with strategic questions like these, that would radically simplify their lives.

So, whenever someone asks you a tough question about yourself, throw a few strategic questions back at them. Then, you will instantly be more comfortable and your answers will be more relevant... all at the same time.

#2: Use a Boomerang...



How do you respond when someone throws an unexpected objection or comment at you?

Try a “psychic boomerang.” Here's how it works.

Let's say someone throws an outrageous statement at you, like,

“You’re too ugly to be my friend.”

Boomerang it back to them, using the phrase, “That’s exactly the reason why...”

“That’s EXACTLY the reason we should be friends. Think about it. Whenever we hang out together, you'll always be the good looking one...”

See how that works?

If they say,

“Your price is higher than the other we’re looking at.”

Simple say:

“Yup! That’s exactly the reason you should go with us. After all, why do you think the other guy’s price is so low in the first place?”

This causes an emotional boomerang, where the force of their statement AGAINST you, suddenly becomes a force FOR you.

Before you roll your eyes, consider this...

The first time I applied this, early in my career, our ad agency won a major contract with Avon cosmetics, using this technique. More recently, someone I was

coaching recently used it. It blew his mind at how powerfully it worked. Here's what happened...

INVESTMENT BANKER ASTONISHED AT HOW WELL THIS WORKED

I was networking with an investment banker. He explained to our group how he was competing with three others to get a business owner to sell his business through their companies.

The problem...

His was the second highest price, so the business owner was balking.

True to form, I asked a simple question...

"Why do you think the others have such low prices? Think about it. Are they desperate? Is that really the one he wants selling his most important possession, his business? And consider this. If he can't get a reasonable price for his business, how will he get the best price for yours?"

He laughed, but promised he'd try it.

A month later, just before our meeting started, he interrupted and exclaimed to the group, "Guys. I have to tell you. This stuff works! It was incredible! I asked the seller two questions..."

"Why do you think the other guys' prices are so low? Have you ever thought about that? You're talking about selling your prize possession, your business. Do you really want to be represented by the cheapest guy on the block? After all, if he can't get the right price for himself, how will he get the right price for you?"

Then, with astonishment, he explained,

"The seller thought for a moment, then said, 'I see your point.' And right then and there, he agreed to sign with me. Incredible!"

So, what about you?

Next time someone throws you a curve, try it! You may be surprised at the power of such a simple statement.

#3: Challenge the Question...



Here's one a psychiatrist told me about, that he guides his clients to use whenever they are challenged, with a question they are uncomfortable answering, or that they feel is inappropriate.

Simply say, "Why would you ask such a question?" or "Why would you ask such a question at a time like this?"

Example:

"Are you having a problem?"

"Why would you ask such a question, especially at a time like this?"

This instantly deflates the power someone else may be trying to have over you, by backing you in a corner or trying to embarrass you.

#4: Answer a Different Question...



Just because someone asks you a question, doesn't mean that's the question you have to answer.

Famed U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, was the master of this.

They'd ask,

“Dr. Kissinger, could you tell us about your historic trip to meet with China's Mao Zedong?”

He'd respond with a diatribe about America-China relations, or something else that had nothing to do with the subject of the question.

The reason he'd get away with it was simple.

It was his tone of voice.

To someone not paying attention, it sounded like he was answering the question. But if you listened to the substance of what he was saying, it wasn't even remotely an answer to that specific question.

Sadly, his style of non-answering, while appearing to be answering, has become the style of many of today's politicians.

USING MOMENTUM TO NOT ANSWER THEIR QUESTION

I actually got to apply this trick extensively with the numerous radio shows I've been on over the years, and it works incredibly well.

For the Father-Daughter Project™ and my behavioral management work, I'd prepare to answer certain questions they might ask. I'd even supply sample questions for the show's host.

But invariably, we'd stray, or the host would throw a question I was unprepared for. Or they would ask an incredibly complicated question that I was unwilling to answer.

Rather than freezing up and causing dead air space on the radio while I formulated my answer, I'd pick a topic as close as possible (if possible) and run with my answer, even though it may have had nothing to do with the question asked.

The result was, I was often considered a great guest, and have been asked back repeatedly on major radio shows.

Don't be fooled by the seeming simplicity of this. As long as you come across as sincere (which I always was), whether it be on radio, on TV or podcasts, in front of a huge audience, or simply being quizzed by a client or co-worker, this technique can be a powerful way to gain credibility without alienating anyone.

Example:

“Tell me, what do you think of President Trump and his relationship with his daughter Ivanka?”

“Father-daughter relationships can be easier than father-son relationships. In fact, let me tell you about my own experience... blab la bla”

See how that works?

I was not prepared or interested in talking politics at the time. So, with my tone of voice and momentum, I enthusiastically seemed to answer, while veering the discussion to something I was more willing to chat about.

When you are faced with a question you are not interested in responding to, try this. I think you will be surprised at how well it works!

#5: Answer a Deeper Question...



What if someone says, “Could I think about it?”

Try asking, WHY?

And keep asking WHY, not obviously, but consistently, until you get the person to admit what’s really on their mind.

Think about it. Why would someone ask, “Could I think about it?” Are they not fully convinced? Are they stuck on the fence, afraid to make a decision? Do they have a concern that has not been voiced?

W. Edwards Deming, one of the fathers of the quality movement after World War II, offered a technique he referred to as 5-WHY, as a way to dig deep and get to the bottom of real issues. He posited that, until and unless you could get to the root of an issue, you had little prayer of being able to resolve it.

Whenever someone asks you a question where you suspect there is a deeper issue that is not being voiced, try 5-WHY, where you ask why, and persist until you get to the “deeper” origin. It could profoundly improve your effectiveness interacting with others.

Example:

“Could I sleep on it before I give you my answer?”

“Why?”

“I want to think it over.”

“Why... what is it that you are unsure of?”

“I just want to consider all the options before I go forward.”

“Have I screwed up somehow? What is your biggest concern? Is it...”

Okay. So, the last one was not a WHY. But the point is important here. Whenever someone throws a tough question that indicates something else is going on, ask WHY and watch where that leads you.

#6: Delay Answering It...



Not every question needs to be answered RIGHT NOW.

If someone asks you a question and you are unwilling or unprepared to answer it, simply say, “Let me think about it.”

There is rarely a reason to let someone bully you into making a rush decision. Do not be afraid to try this. It can give you tremendous peace of mind while getting someone persistence of your back.

#7: Don't Answer It...



Lastly, not every tough question needs to be answered.

Learn to be comfortable saying, “I am not prepared to answer that now,” – or simply, “I’m not going to answer.”

Like the other examples in this book, the more you practice, the better you’ll be at applying these seven ways to answer tough questions...

1. **Throw it Back to Them... answer a question with a question**
2. **Use a Boomerang... “that’s exactly the reason why...”**
3. **Challenge the Question – “Why would you ask such a question?”**
4. **Answer a Different Question Than What’s Asked – Henry Kissinger’s favorite technique**
5. **Answer the Deeper Question – 5WHY**
6. **Delay Answering It... “Let me think about it...”**
7. **Don’t Answer**

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About the Author:



James I. Bond is a behavioral management coach, and a business marketing and management specialist.

His clients have included a who's who of American business, as well as hundreds of entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Besides his expertise in marketing, management and strategic planning, James is a specialist in consumer behavior and behavioral management.

For thirteen years he ran one of the West Coast's leading behavioral management firms, employing PhDs in psychology and organizational development, and more than 22 coaches from the nation's top consulting organizations. Major clients included Amgen (the world's largest biotech company), Gannett Media (publisher of USA-Today), Tenet Healthcare, British GE, and others.

Early in his career, James ran a regional advertising agency working with such clients as Kraft Foods, Timex, Avon Cosmetics, Abbott Laboratories, and Seagram's Distillers.

More recently, he has been a workshop chairman for SCORE, the resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration, where he oversaw workshops and trainings for thousands of



entrepreneurs and small business owners. As a workshop presenter, and a senior marketing and behavioral management counselor for SCORE, he has helped hundreds of individuals and businesses in a wide range of industries and professions, across the U.S. and internationally.

James is also a popular presenter at Southern California universities, on marketing, entrepreneurship and behavioral management.